

Will the Church Go Through the Tribulation?



by Pastor Lee Roberson, D.D. (1909-2007)

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." — MATTHEW 24:21

In my last message I spoke of the coming of Christ and the Christians' judgment. We noticed the following things:

This judgment will take place in the air when Jesus returns for His saints; it concerns only Christians, not the unsaved; this judgment has to do with rewards, not salvation; we will stand in this judgment in our resurrection or translation bodies; the outcome of this judgment will be the giving of rewards to some, and the suffering of loss by others. We should endeavor to work in such a way for our Master that our works will abide the testing of the judgment seat of Christ.

Let us notice that the rapture of the saints will occur before the tribulation begins. There are some Premillennialists who would try to say that the church goes through the tribulation, and then Christ comes. If this be so, then His coming would not be sudden and unannounced. It would not be as a thief in the night. We are to watch for the coming of Christ and not for the tribulation. His coming for the redeemed will precede the awfulness of the tribulation time. There is no evidence that any of the saved will be left when He comes.

Let us remember that Paul said, "The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air . . ."

There are some people who believe that only exceptionally good Christians will go up in the rapture and that bad Christians will be left on the earth. I do not find this teaching in the Word of God. It is true that some Christians are better than others. They live clean lives and work faithfully for the Saviour. There are others who compromise with the world. They are indifferent to the commands of Christ; their lives are not effective in His service. These people will lose their rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.

All Christians will go up to meet Christ when He comes. They will then stand before the judgment seat and be judged. "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God." (I Corinthians 4:5).

We do not need to fear the tribulation, for we will be in the presence of the Lord. In Revelation 3:10 we read, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." This is the promise of Christ to us, that we are to be kept from the hour of trial — the Great Tribulation.

Notice the following things:

I. The Coming of Christ is Imminent

The word "imminent" means that it might happen at any time. It is as a sword hanging by a tiny thread. At any moment the thread may break and the sword fall. Because the coming of Christ is imminent, we are exhorted to be in a state of constant expectancy waiting for His coming. Turn to Matthew 24:36-51:

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

From this passage we learn the following:

1. The day of the Lord's coming is known to no man.
2. The hour of the Lord's coming is not known.
3. Neither the day nor the hour are known to the angels in Heaven.
4. The coming of the Lord will be as unexpected as the coming of the flood.
5. It will be as much without previous sign or warning as the coming of a thief.
6. Because the Lord is coming at an unexpected day and hour, like the flood, He exhorts the disciples to watch.
7. Because His coming is without previous sign or warning, like a thief, He says, "Be ready."

We are to watch and to be ready for this sudden coming of our Saviour, for "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" the dead in Christ shall be raised and the living shall be changed and caught up into the air.

There are some people who think that it is farfetched to think of the translation of saints into the air, but God has given us a picture of what it means. In the days before the flood we find that Enoch "walked with God, and he was not; for God took him." Or, as the New Testament says, he was translated, 'having never seen death.' Later on in God's Book we have the story of Elijah who was translated and carried into Heaven in a chariot of fire. Since this was accomplished for Enoch and Elijah, it is not impossible for God to do the same for all His children who are living when Jesus comes.

This brings us to a blessed thought. There is one generation of men that shall never see death. Those who are believing on Christ and saved shall be caught up into the air to meet Him when He comes. What a wonderful thing to anticipate! Christ may come any moment, and in a moment we are caught up to meet Him.

Look for the coming of Christ and listen for the sounds, for when He comes there will be a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. Yes, there will be a generation of saints who will never taste of death, but will go into the presence of Christ.

II. The Tribulation Begins When the Church is Caught Up and the Holy Spirit Taken Out of the World

The Great Tribulation is a time of judgment upon a Christ-rejecting world. We are going to be taken out, and then the judgment will fall.

In the days of Noah, when Noah and his family were safe in the ark, the judgment of the flood came and took them all away. After Lot left Sodom, the fire and brimstone rained upon the city. These are pictures of that which will occur when the saints are taken out. The judgment will fall.

After speaking of the days of Lot, Jesus said:

"I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left." -- Luke 17:34-36.

In one part of the earth it will be nighttime when Jesus comes, and He pictures the scene by two men in one bed. One was a Christian; the other was not. Before retiring the night before, the Christian man prayed to God, and in the night suddenly he was caught up. Let us suppose that the other man scoffed at his friend for praying, and ridiculed his faith. When the morning light broke, he was alone in the bed. He searched for his friend, but found him not.

When Jesus said, "Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left," this is a morning time scene. The women are grinding the meal for the day. Suddenly one is taken out of sight. The other is left.

When Jesus comes, throughout the entire world there will be consternation and confusion as the saints are caught up and the unsaved are left. Think of the stores and business establishments with only a few left to operate the business. Think of

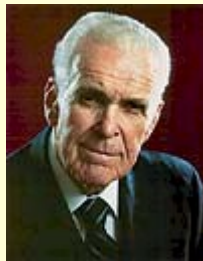
transportation systems, tied up completely because of the going of Christian men. You can simply turn your imagination loose and still not exceed the confusion which will come upon this earth.

When the saints are caught up, the tribulation begins. The tribulation is a period of unparalleled suffering which will come upon the world. When the Holy Spirit is taken out of the way, then iniquity will have its way, then the Antichrist will be revealed.

There is only one safe place for any person, and that is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe in Him as Saviour; follow Him as Lord and Master. Think much of His coming again and live accordingly. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

SOURCE: Chapter 3 from the excellent book, *Some Golden Daybreak*, by Dr. Lee Roberson, D.D. (copyright 1957)

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